

THE PHILOSOPHY OF HEGEL

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Hegel (1770-1831) was the culmination of the movement in German philosophy that started from Kant; although he often criticized Kant, his system could never have arisen if Kant's had not existed. His influence, though now diminishing, has been very great, not only or chiefly

¹ Bertrand Arthur William Russell, "Hegel," *History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1947, 757-773. [1946] Christopher Richard Wade Dettling, editor, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, Bertrand Arthur William Russell, archive.org, 2016.

in Germany. At the end of the nineteenth century, the leading academic philosophers, both in America and in Great Britain, were largely Hegelians. Outside of pure philosophy, many Protestant theologians adopted his doctrines, and his philosophy of history profoundly affected political theory. Marx, as everyone knows, was a disciple of Hegel in his youth, and retained in his own finished system some important Hegelian features. Even if (as I myself believe) almost all Hegel's doctrines are false, he still retains an importance which is not merely historical, as the best representative of a certain kind of philosophy which, in others, is less coherent and less comprehensive.²

² See: "[Hegel] was great, on the one hand by his metaphysical results, on the other by his logical method; on the one hand as the crown of dogmatic philosophy, on the other as the founder of the dialectic, with its then revolutionary doctrine of historical development. Both these aspects of Hegel's work revolutionised thought ... the practical tendency of his *metaphysics* was, and is, to glorify existing institutions, to see in Church and State the objective embodiment of the Absolute Idea, his *dialectic method* tended to exhibit no proposition as unqualified truth, no state of things as final perfection ... The validity of this view we need not here examine; it is sufficient to point out that Hegel, in his 'Philosophy of History,' endeavoured to exhibit the actual course of the world as following the same necessary

His life contained few events of importance. In youth he was much attracted to mysticism, and his later views may be regarded, to some extent, as an intellectualizing of what had first appeared to him as mystic insight. He taught philosophy, first as *Privatdozent* at Jena—he mentions that he finished his *Phenomenology of Mind* there the day before the battle of Jena—then at Nuremberg, then as professor at Heidelberg (1816-1818), and finally at Berlin from 1818 to his death. He was in later life a patriotic Prussian, a loyal servant of the State, who comfortably enjoyed his recognized philosophical pre-eminence; but in his youth he despised Prussia and admired Napoleon, to the extent of rejoicing in the French victory at Jena.

Hegel's philosophy is very difficult—he is, I should say, the hardest to understand of all the great

chain of development which, as it exists in thought, forms the subject of his logic ... the development of the world therefore proceeds by action and reaction, or, in technical language, by thesis and antithesis, and these become reconciled in a higher unity, the synthesis of both ... we *might* live to see another French Revolution, perhaps even more glorious than the first, leaving Social Democracy to try one of the greatest and most crucial experiments in political history.” Bertrand Arthur William Russell, *German Social Democracy: Six Lectures*, London and New York, 1896, 2-162. [Editor]

philosophers. Before entering on any detail, a general characterization may prove helpful.

From his early interest in mysticism he retained a belief in the unreality of separateness; the world, in his view, was not a collection of hard units, whether atoms or souls, each completely self-subsistent. The apparent self-subsistence of finite things [758] appeared to him to be an illusion; nothing, he held, is ultimately and completely real except the whole. But he differed from Parmenides and Spinoza in conceiving the whole, not as a simple substance, but as a complex system, of the sort that we should call an organism. The apparently separate things of which the world seems to be composed are not simply an illusion; each has a greater or lesser degree of reality, and its reality consists in an aspect of the whole, which is what it is seen to be when viewed truly. With this view goes naturally a disbelief in the reality of time and space as such, for these, if taken as completely real, involve separateness and multiplicity. All this must have come to him first as mystic “insight”; its intellectual elaboration, which is given in his books, must have come later.

Hegel asserts that the real is rational, and the rational is real. But when he says this he does not mean by “the real” what an empiricist would mean. He admits, and even urges, that what to the empiricist appear to be facts are, and must be, irrational; it is only after their apparent character has been transformed by viewing them as aspects of the whole that they are seen to be rational. Nevertheless, the identification of the real and the rational leads unavoidably to some of the complacency inseparable from the belief that “whatever is, is right.”

The whole, in all its complexity, is called by Hegel “the Absolute.” The Absolute is spiritual; Spinoza’s view, that it has the attribute of extension as well as that of thought, is rejected.

Two things distinguish Hegel from other men who have had a more or less similar metaphysical outlook. One of these is emphasis on logic: It is thought by Hegel that the nature of Reality can be deduced from the sole consideration that it must be not self-contradictory. The other distinguishing feature (which is closely connected with the first) is the triadic movement called the “dialectic.” His most important books are his two *Logics*,

and these must be understood if the reasons for his views on other subjects are to be rightly apprehended.

Logic, as Hegel understands the word, is declared by him to be the same thing as metaphysics; it is something quite different from what is commonly called logic. His view is that any ordinary predicate, if taken as qualifying the whole of Reality, turns out to be self-contradictory. One might take as a crude example the theory of Parmenides, that the One, which alone is real, is spherical. **[759]** Nothing can be spherical unless it has a boundary, and it cannot have a boundary unless there is something (at least empty space) outside of it. Therefore to suppose the Universe as a whole to be spherical is self-contradictory. (This argument might be questioned by bringing in non-Euclidean geometry, but as an illustration it will serve.) Or let us take another illustration, still more crude—far too much so to be used by Hegel. You may say, without apparent contradiction, that Mr. A is an uncle; but if you were to say that the Universe is an uncle, you would land yourself in difficulties. An uncle is a man who has a nephew, and the nephew is a separate person from the uncle; therefore an uncle cannot be the whole of Reality.

This illustration might also be used to illustrate the dialectic, which consists of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. First we say: "Reality is an uncle." This is the thesis. But the existence of an uncle implies that of a nephew. Since nothing really exists except the Absolute, and we are now committed to the existence of a nephew, we must conclude: "The Absolute is a nephew." This is the antithesis. But there is the same objection to this as to the view that the Absolute is an uncle; therefore we are driven to the view that the Absolute is the whole composed of uncle and nephew. This is the synthesis. But this synthesis is still unsatisfactory, because a man can be an uncle only if he has a brother or sister who is a parent of the nephew. Hence we are driven to enlarge our universe to include the brother or sister, with his wife or her husband. In this sort of way, so it is contended, we can be driven on, by the mere force of logic, from any suggested predicate of the Absolute to the final conclusion of the dialectic, which is called the "Absolute Idea." Throughout the whole process, there is an underlying assumption that nothing can be really true unless it is about Reality as a whole.

For this underlying assumption there is a basis in traditional logic, which assumes that every proposition has a subject and a predicate. According to this view, every fact consists in something having some property. It follows that relations cannot be real, since they involve *two* things, not one. “Uncle” is a relation, and a man may become an uncle without knowing it. In that case, from an empirical point of view, the man is unaffected by becoming an uncle; he has no quality which he did not have before, if by “quality” we understand something necessary to describing him [760] as he is in himself, apart from his relations to other people and things. The only way in which the subject-predicate logic can avoid this difficulty is to say that the truth is not a property of the uncle alone, or of the nephew alone, but of the whole composed of uncle-and-nephew. Since everything, except the Whole, has relations to outside things, it follows that nothing quite true can be said about separate things, and that in fact only the Whole is real. This follows more directly from the fact that “A and B are two” is not a subject-predicate proposition, and therefore, on the basis of the traditional logic, there can be no such proposition. Therefore there are not as many

as two things in the world; therefore the Whole, considered as a unity, is alone real.

The above argument is not explicit in Hegel, but is implicit in his system, as in that of many other metaphysicians.

A few examples of Hegel's dialectic method may serve to make it more intelligible. He begins the argument of his logic by the assumption that "the Absolute is Pure Being"; we assume that it just *is*, without assigning any qualities to it. But pure being without any qualities is nothing; therefore we are led to the antithesis: "The Absolute is Nothing." From this thesis and antithesis we pass on to the synthesis: The union of Being and Not-Being is Becoming, and so we say: "The Absolute is Becoming." This also, of course, won't do, because there has to be something that becomes. In this way our views of Reality develop by the continue correction of previous errors, all of which arose from undue abstraction, by taking something finite or limited as if it could be the whole. "The limitations of the finite do not come merely from without; its own nature is the cause of its abrogation, and by its own act it passes into its counterpart."

The process, according to Hegel, is essential to the understanding of the result. Each later stage of the dialectic contains all the earlier stages, as it were in solution; none of them is wholly superseded, but is given its proper place as a moment in the Whole. It is therefore impossible to reach the truth except by going through all the steps of the dialectic.

Knowledge as a whole has its triadic movement. It begins with sense-perception, in which there is only awareness of the object. Then, through sceptical criticism of the senses, it becomes purely subjective. At last, it reaches the stage of self-knowledge, in which subject and object are no longer distinct. Thus self-consciousness **[761]** is the highest form of knowledge. This, of course, must be the case in Hegel's system, for the highest kind of knowledge must be that possessed by the Absolute, and as the Absolute is the Whole there is nothing outside itself for it to know.

In the best thinking, according to Hegel, thoughts become fluent and interfuse. Truth and falsehood are not sharply defined opposites, as is commonly supposed; nothing is wholly false, and nothing that we can know is wholly true. "We can know in a way that is false"; this

happens when we attribute absolute truth to some detached piece of information. Such a question as “Where was Caesar born?” has a straightforward answer, which is true in a sense, but not in the philosophical sense. For philosophy, “the truth is the whole,” and nothing partial is *quite* true.

“Reason,” Hegel says, “is the conscious certainty of being all reality.” This does not mean that a separate person is all reality; in his separateness he is not quite real, but what is real in him is his participation in Reality as a whole. In proportion as we become more rational, this participation is increased.

The Absolute Idea, with which the *Logic* ends, is something like Aristotle’s God. It is thought thinking about itself. Clearly the Absolute cannot think about anything but itself, since there is nothing else, except to our partial and erroneous ways of apprehending Reality. We are told that Spirit is the only reality, and that its thought is reflected into itself by self-consciousness. The actual words in which the Absolute Idea is defined are very obscure. Wallace translates them as follows:

“*The Absolute Idea*. The idea, as unity of the Subjective and Objective Idea, is the notion of the Idea—

a notion whose object (*Gegenstand*) is the Idea as such, and for which the objective (*Objekt*) is Idea—an Object which embraces all characteristics in its unity.”

The original German is even more difficult.³ The essence of the matter is, however, somewhat less complicated than Hegel makes it seem. The Absolute Idea is pure thought thinking about pure thought. This is all that God does throughout the ages—truly a Professor’s God. Hegel goes on to say: “This unity is consequently the absolute and all truth, the Idea which thinks itself.” **[762]**

I come now to a singular feature of Hegel’s philosophy, which distinguishes it from the philosophy of Plato or Plotinus or Spinoza. Although ultimate reality is timeless, and time is merely an illusion generated by our inability to see the Whole, yet the time-process has an intimate relation to the purely logical process of the dialectic. World history, in fact, has advanced through the categories, from Pure Being in China (of which Hegel knew nothing except that it was) to the Absolute Idea, which seems to have been nearly, if not quite, realized in

³ The definition in German is; “*Der Begriff der Idee, dem die Idee als solche der Gegenstand, dem das Objekt sie ist.*” Except in Hegel, *Gegenstand* and *Objekt* are synonyms.

the Prussian State. I cannot see any justification, on the basis of his own metaphysic, for the view that world history repeats the transitions of the dialectic, yet that is the thesis which he developed in his *Philosophy of History*. It was an interesting thesis, giving unity and meaning to the revolutions of human affairs. Like other historical theories, it required, if it was to be made plausible, some distortion of facts and considerable ignorance. Hegel, like Marx and Spengler after him, possessed both these qualifications. It is odd that a process which is represented as cosmic should all have taken place on our planet, and most of it near the Mediterranean. Nor is there any reason, if reality is timeless, why the later parts of the process should embody higher categories than the earlier parts—unless one were to adopt the blasphemous supposition that the Universe was gradually learning Hegel's philosophy.

The time-process, according to Hegel, is from the less to the more perfect, both in an ethical and in a logical sense. Indeed these two senses are, for him, not really distinguishable, for logical perfection consists in being a closely-knit whole, without ragged edges, without independent parts, but united, like a human body, or still

more like a reasonable mind, into an organism whose parts are interdependent and all work together towards a single end; and this also constitutes ethical perfection. A few quotations will illustrate Hegel's theory:

“Like the soul-conductor Mercury, the Idea is, in truth, the leader of peoples and of the world; and Spirit, the rational and necessitated will of that conductor, is and has been the director of the events of the world's history. To become acquainted with Spirit in this its office of guidance, is the object of our present Undertaking.

“The only thought which philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of history is the simple conception of Reason; that [763] Reason is the sovereign of the world; that the history of the world, therefore, presents us with a rational process. This conviction and intuition is a hypothesis in the domain of history as such. In that of philosophy it is no hypothesis. It is there proved by speculative cognition, that Reason—and this term may here suffice us, without investigating the relation sustained by the universe to the Divine Being—is *Substance*, as well as *Infinite Power*; its own *infinite material* underlying all the natural and spiritual life which it originates, as also the *Infinite Form*, that which sets the

material in motion. Reason is the *substance* of the universe.”

“That this ‘Idea’ or ‘Reason’ is the *True*, the *Eternal*, the absolutely *powerful* essence; that it reveals itself in the world, and that in that world nothing else is revealed but this and its honour and glory—is the thesis which, as we have said, has been proved in philosophy, and is here regarded as demonstrated.”

“The world of intelligence and conscious volition is not abandoned to chance, but must show itself in the light of the self-cognizant Idea.”

This is “a result which happens to be known to me, because I have traversed the entire field.”

All these quotations are from the introduction to *The Philosophy of History*.

Spirit, and the course of its development, is the substantial object of the philosophy of history. The nature of Spirit may be understood by contrasting it with its opposite, namely Matter. The essence of matter is gravity; the essence of Spirit is Freedom. Matter is outside itself, whereas Spirit has its centre in itself. “Spirit is self-contained existence.” If this is not clear, the following definition may be found more illuminating:

“But what is Spirit? It is the one immutably homogeneous Infinite—pure Identity—which in its second phase separates itself from itself and makes this second aspect its own polar opposite, namely as existence for and in Self as contrasted with the Universal.

“In the historical development of Spirit there have been three main phases: The Orientals, the Greeks and Romans, and the Germans. “The history of the world is the discipline of the uncontrolled natural will, bringing it into obedience to a universal principle and conferring subjective freedom. The East knew, and to the present day knows, only that *One* is free; the Greek and [764] Roman world, that *some* are free; the German world knows that *All* are free.” One might have supposed that democracy would be the appropriate form of government where all are free, but not so. Democracy and aristocracy alike belong to the stage where some are free, despotism to that where one is free, and *monarchy* to that in which all are free. This is connected with the very odd sense in which Hegel uses the word “freedom.” For him (and so far we may agree) there is no freedom without law; but he tends to convert this, and to argue that wherever there is law there is freedom. Thus

freedom, for him, means little more than the right to obey the law.

As might be expected, he assigns the highest role to the Germans in the terrestrial development of Spirit. “The German spirit is the spirit of the new world. Its aim is the realization of absolute Truth as the unlimited self-determination of freedom—*that* freedom which has its own absolute form itself as its purport.”

This is a very superfine brand of freedom. It does not mean that you will be able to keep out of a concentration camp. It does not imply democracy, or a free press,⁴ or any of the usual Liberal watchwords, which Hegel rejects with contempt. When Spirit gives laws to itself, it does so freely. To our mundane vision, it may seem that the Spirit that gives laws is embodied in the monarch, and the Spirit to which laws are given is embodied in his subjects. But from the point of view of the Absolute the distinction between monarch and subjects, like all other distinctions, is illusory, and when the monarch imprisons a liberal-minded subject, that is still Spirit freely

⁴ Freedom of the Press, he says, does not consist in being allowed to write what one wants: This view is crude and superficial. For instance, the Press should not be allowed to render the Government or the police contemptible.

determining itself. Hegel praises Rousseau for distinguishing between the general will and the will of all. One gathers that the monarch embodies the general will, whereas a parliamentary majority only embodies the will of all. A very convenient doctrine.

German history is divided by Hegel into three periods: The first, up to Charlemagne; the second, from Charlemagne to the Reformation; the third, from the Reformation onwards. These three periods are distinguished as the Kingdoms of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, respectively. It seems a little odd **[765]** that the Kingdom of the Holy Ghost should have begun with the bloody and utterly abominable atrocities committed in suppressing the Peasants' War, but Hegel, naturally, does not mention so trivial an incident. Instead, he goes off, as might be expected, into praises of Machiavelli.

Hegel's interpretation of history since the fall of the Roman Empire is partly the effect, and partly the cause, of the teaching of world history in German schools. In Italy and France, while there has been a romantic admiration of the Germans on the part of a few men such as Tacitus and Machiavelli, they have been viewed, in

general, as the authors of the “barbarian” invasion, and as enemies of the Church, first under the great Emperors, and later as the leaders of the Reformation. Until the nineteenth century the Latin nations looked upon the Germans as their inferiors in civilization. Protestants in Germany naturally took a different view. They regarded the late Romans as effete, and considered the German conquest of the Western Empire an essential step towards revivification. In relation to the conflict of Empire and Papacy in the Middle Ages, they took a Ghibelline view: To this day, German schoolboys are taught a boundless admiration of Charlemagne and Barbarossa. In the times after the Reformation, the political weakness and disunity of Germany was deplored, and the gradual rise of Prussia was welcomed as making Germany strong under Protestant leadership, not under the Catholic and somewhat feeble leadership of Austria. Hegel, in philosophizing about history, has in mind such men as Theodoric, Charlemagne, Barbarossa, Luther, and Frederick the Great. He is to be interpreted in the light of their exploits, and in the light of the then recent humiliation of Germany by Napoleon.

So much is Germany glorified that one might expect to find it the final embodiment of the Absolute Idea, beyond which no further development would be possible. But this is not Hegel's view. On the contrary, he says that America is the land of the future, "where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the world's history shall reveal itself—perhaps [he adds characteristically] in a contest between North and South America." He seems to think that everything important takes the form of war. If it were suggested to him that the attribution of America to world history might be the development of a society without extreme poverty, he would not be interested. On the contrary, he says **[766]** that, as yet, there is no real State in America, because a real State requires a division of classes into rich and poor.

Nations, in Hegel, play the part that classes play in Marx. The principle of historical development, he says, is national genius. In every age, there is some one nation which is charged with the mission of carrying the world through the stage of the dialectic that it has reached. In our age, of course, this nation is Germany. But in addition to nations, we must also take account of world-historical individuals; these are men in whose aims are embodied

the dialectical transitions that are due to take place in their time. These men are heroes, and may justifiably contravene ordinary moral rules. Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon are given as examples. I doubt whether, in Hegel's opinion, a man could be a "hero" without being a military conqueror.

Hegel's emphasis on nations, together with his peculiar conception of "freedom," explains his glorification of the State—a very important aspect of his political philosophy, to which we must now turn our attention. His philosophy of the State is developed both in his *Philosophy of History* and in his *Philosophy of Law*. It is in the main compatible with his general metaphysic, but not necessitated by it; at certain points, however—*e.g.*, as regards the relations between States—his admiration of the national State is carried so far as to become inconsistent with his general preference of wholes to parts.

Glorification of the State begins, so far as modern times are concerned, with the Reformation. In the Roman Empire, the Emperor was deified, and the State thereby acquired a sacred character; but the philosophers of the Middle Ages, with few exceptions,

were ecclesiastics, and therefore put the Church above the State. Luther, finding support in Protestant princes, began the opposite practice; the Lutheran Church, on the whole, was Erastian. Hobbes, who was politically a Protestant, developed the doctrine of the supremacy of the State, and Spinoza, on the whole, agreed with him. Rousseau, as we have seen, thought the State should not tolerate other political organizations. Hegel was vehemently Protestant, of the Lutheran section; the Prussian State was an Erastian absolute monarchy. These reasons would make one expect to find the State highly valued by Hegel, but, even so, he goes to lengths which are astonishing.

We are told in *The Philosophy of History* that “the State is the [767] actually existing realized moral life,” and that all the spiritual reality possessed by a human being he possesses only through the State. “For his spiritual reality consists in this, that his own essence—Reason—is objectively present to him, that it possesses objective immediate existence for him ... For truth is the unity of the universal and subjective Will, and the universal is to be found in the State, in its laws, its universal and rational arrangements. The State is the

Divine Idea as it exists on earth.” Again: “The State is the embodiment of rational freedom, realizing and recognizing itself in an objective form ... The State is the Idea of Spirit in the external manifestation of human Will and its Freedom.”

The *Philosophy of Law*, in the section on the State, develops the same doctrine somewhat more fully. “The State is the reality of the moral idea the moral spirit, as the visible substantial will, evident to itself, which thinks and knows itself, and fulfils what it knows in so far as it knows it.” The State is the rational in and for itself. If the State existed only for the interests of individuals (as Liberals contend), an individual might or might not be a member of the State. It has, however, a quite different relation to the individual: Since it is objective Spirit, the individual only has objectivity, truth, and morality in so far as he is a member of the State, whose true content and purpose is union as such. It is admitted that there may be bad States, but these merely exist, and have no true reality, whereas a rational State is infinite in itself.

It will be seen that Hegel claims for the State much the same position as St. Augustine and his Catholic successors claimed for the Church. There are, however,

two respects in which the Catholic claim is more reasonable than Hegel's. In the first place, the Church is not a chance geographical association, but a body united by a common creed, believed by its members to be of supreme importance; it is thus in its very essence the embodiment of what Hegel calls the "Idea." In the second place there is only one Catholic Church, whereas there are many States. When each State, in relation to its subjects, is made as absolute as Hegel makes it, there is difficulty in finding any philosophical principle by which to regulate the relations between different States. In fact, at this point Hegel abandons his philosophical talk, falling back on the state of nature and Hobbes's war of all against all. [768] The habit of speaking of "*the* State," as if there were only one, is misleading so long as there is no world State. Duty being, for Hegel, solely a relation of the individual to his State, no principle is left by which to moralize the relations between States. This Hegel recognizes. In external relations, he says, the State is an individual, and each State is independent as against the others. "Since in this independence the being-for-self of real spirit has its existence, it is the first freedom and highest honour of a people." He goes on to argue against

any sort of *League of Nations* by which the independence of separate States might be limited. The duty of a citizen is entirely confined (so far as the external relations of his State are concerned) to upholding the substantial individuality and independence and sovereignty of his own State. It follows that war is not wholly an evil, or something that we should seek to abolish. The purpose of the State is not merely to uphold the life and property of the citizens, and this fact provides the moral justification of war, which is not to be regarded as an absolute evil or as accidental, or as having its cause in something that ought not to be.

Hegel does not mean only that, in some situations, a nation cannot rightly avoid going to war. He means much more than this. He is opposed to the creation of institutions—such as a world government—which would prevent such situations from arising, because he thinks it a good thing that there should be wars from time to time. War, he says, is the condition in which we take seriously the vanity of temporal goods and things. (This view is to be contrasted with the opposite theory, that all wars have economic causes.) War has a positive moral value: “War has the higher significance that through it the

moral health of peoples is preserved in their indifference towards the stabilizing of finite determinations.” Peace is ossification; the Holy Alliance, and Kant’s League for Peace, are mistaken, because a family of States needs an enemy. Conflicts of States can only be decided by war; States being towards each other in a state of nature, their relations are not legal or moral. Their rights have their reality in their particular wills, and the interest of each State is its own highest law. There is no contrast of morals and politics, because States are not subject to ordinary moral laws.

Such is Hegel’s doctrine of the State—a doctrine which, if accepted, justifies every internal tyranny and every external **[769]** aggression that can possibly be imagined.⁵ The strength of his bias appears in the fact

⁵ See: “[In *The Philosophy of Right*] the state so described is unlike any existing state in Hegel’s day. It is a form of limited monarchy, with parliamentary government, trial by jury and toleration for Jews and dissenters. In all these respects it differed from the contemporary Prussia. It has often been said by Hegel’s detractors that his book was written on the ‘dunghill of servility’ and that his ideal state is identified with the monarchy of Friedrich William III. Little historical knowledge and little study of Hegel is required to see that this is nonsense.” Thomas Malcolm Knox, “Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel,”

that his theory is largely inconsistent with his own metaphysic, and that the inconsistencies are all such as tend to the justification of cruelty and international brigandage. A man may be pardoned if logic compels him regretfully to reach conclusions which he deplores, but not for departing from logic in order to be free to advocate crimes. Hegel's logic led him to believe that there is more reality or excellence (the two for him are synonyms) in wholes than in their parts, and that a whole increases in reality and excellence as it becomes more organized. This justified him in preferring a State to an anarchic collection of individuals, but it should equally have led him to prefer a world State to an anarchic collection of States. Within the State, his general philosophy should have led him to feel more respect for the individual than he did feel, for the wholes of which his *Logic* treats are not like the One of Parmenides, or even like Spinoza's God: They are wholes in which the individual does not disappear, but acquires fuller reality through his harmonious relation to a larger organism. A

Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th edition, vol., 11, Chicago, 1967, 303.
[Editor]

State in which the individual is ignored is not a small-scale model of the Hegelian Absolute.

Nor is there any good reason, in Hegel's metaphysic, for the exclusive emphasis on the State, as opposed to other social organizations. I can see nothing but Protestant bias in his preference of the State to the Church. Moreover, if it is good that society should be as organic as possible, as Hegel believes, then many social organizations are necessary, in addition to the State and the Church. It should follow from Hegel's principles that every interest which is not harmful to the community, and which can be promoted by co-operation, should have its appropriate organization, and that every such organization should have its quota of limited independence. It may be objected that ultimate authority must reside somewhere, and cannot reside elsewhere than in the State. But even so it may be desirable that this ultimate authority should not be irresistible when it attempts to be oppressive beyond a point.

This brings us to a question which is fundamental in judging Hegel's whole philosophy. Is there more reality, and is there more value, in a whole than in its parts?

Hegel answers both questions in the affirmative. The question of reality is metaphysical, the **[770]** question of value is ethical. They are commonly treated as if they were scarcely distinguishable, but to my mind it is important to keep them apart. Let us begin with the metaphysical question.

The view of Hegel, and of many other philosophers, is that the character of any portion of the universe is so profoundly affected by its relations to the other parts and to the whole, that no true statement can be made about any part except to assign it its place in the whole. Since its place in the whole depends upon all the other parts, a true statement about its place in the whole will at the same time assign the place of every other part in the whole. Thus there can be only one true statement; there is no truth except the whole truth. And similarly nothing is quite real except the whole, for any part, when isolated, is changed in character by being isolated, and therefore no longer appears quite what it truly is. On the other hand, when a part is viewed in relation to the whole, as it should be, it is seen to be not self-subsistent, and to be incapable of existing except as part of just that

whole which alone is truly real. This is the metaphysical doctrine.

The ethical doctrine, which maintains that value resides in the whole rather than in the parts, must be true if the metaphysical doctrine is true, but need not be false if the metaphysical doctrine is false. It may, moreover, be true of some wholes and not of others. It is obviously true, in some sense, of a living body. The eye is worthless when separated from the body; a collection of *disjecta membra*, even when complete, has not the value that once belonged to the body from which they were taken. Hegel conceives the ethical relation of the citizen to the State as analogous to that of the eye to the body: In his place the citizen is part of a valuable whole, but isolated he is as useless as an isolated eye. The analogy, however, is open to question; from the ethical importance of some wholes, that of all wholes does not follow.

The above statement of the ethical problem is defective in one important respect, namely, that it does not take account of the distinction between ends and means. An eye in a living body is *useful*, that is to say, it has value as a means; but it has no more *intrinsic* value

than when detached from the body. A thing has intrinsic value when it is prized for its own sake, not as a means to something else. We value the eye as a means to seeing. Seeing may be a means or an end; it is a means when it shows us food or [771] enemies, it is an end when it shows us something that we find beautiful. The State is obviously valuable as a means: It protects us against thieves and murderers, it provides roads and schools, and so on. It may, of course, also be bad as a means, for example by waging an unjust war. The real question we have to ask in connection with Hegel is not this, but whether the State is good *per se*, as an end: Do the citizens exist for the sake of the State, or the State for the sake of the citizens? Hegel holds the former view; the liberal philosophy that comes from Locke holds the latter.⁶ It is clear that we shall only attribute intrinsic value to the State if we think of it as having a life of its

⁶ See: "All things that exist being particulars ... every man's reasoning and knowledge is only about the ideas existing in his own mind." John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690. Thus, the world does not exist, according to John Locke, while the universe is appearance and delusion. See Cartesius: "*Ego cogito, ergo sum, sive existo ... ea enim est natura nostrae mentis, ut generales propositiones ex particularium cognitione efformet.*" [Editor]

own, as being in some sense a person. At this point, Hegel's metaphysic becomes relevant to the question of value. A person is a complex whole, having a single life; can there be a super-person, composed of persons as the body is composed of organs, and having a single life which is not the sum of the lives of the component persons? If there can be such a super-person, as Hegel thinks, then the State may be such a being, and it may be as superior to ourselves as the whole body is to the eye. But if we think this super-person a mere metaphysical monstrosity, then we shall say that the intrinsic value of a community is derived from that of its members, and that the State is a means, not an end. We are thus brought back from the ethical to the metaphysical question. The metaphysical question itself, we shall find, is really a question of logic.

The question at issue is much wider than the truth or falsehood of Hegel's philosophy; it is the question that divides the friends of analysis from its enemies.⁷ Let us

⁷ See: "No logical absurdity results from the hypothesis that the world consists of myself and my thoughts and feelings and sensations, and that everything else is mere fancy ... Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite

take an illustration. Suppose I say “John is the father of James.” Hegel, and all who believe in what Marshal Smuts calls “holism,” will say: “Before you can understand this statement, you must know who John and James are. Now to know who John is, is to know all his characteristics, for apart from them he would not be distinguishable from any one else. But all his characteristics involve other people or things. He is characterized by his relations to his parents, his wife, and his children, by whether he is a good or a bad citizen, and by the country to which he belongs. All these things you must know before you can be said to know whom the word “John” refers to. Step by step, in your endeavour to say what you mean by the word “John,” you will be led to take account of the whole universe, and your original statement will turn out to be telling you something **[772]** about the universe, not about two separate people, John and James.”

Now this is all very well, but it is open to an initial objection. If the above argument were sound, how could knowledge ever begin? I know numbers of propositions

answers can, as a rule, be known to be true.” Bertrand Arthur William Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, London, 1912, 34-249. [Editor]

of the form “A is the father of B,” but I do not know the whole universe. If all knowledge were knowledge of the universe as a whole, there would be no knowledge. This is enough to make us suspect a mistake somewhere.

The fact is that, in order to use the word “John” correctly and intelligently, I do not need to know *all* about John, but only enough to recognize him. No doubt he has relations, near or remote, to everything in the universe, but he can be spoken of truly without taking them into account, except such as are the direct subject-matter of what is being said. He may be the father of Jemima as well as of James, but it is not necessary for me to know this in order to know that he is the father of James. If Hegel were right, we could not state fully what is meant by “John is the father of James” without mentioning Jemima: We ought to say “John, the father of Jemima, is the father of James.” This would still be inadequate; we should have to go on to mention his parents and grandparents, and a whole Who’s Who. But this lands us in absurdities. The Hegelian position might be stated as follows: “The word ‘John’ means all that is true of John.” But as a definition this is circular, since the word “John occurs in the defining phrase. In fact, if Hegel

were right, no word could begin to have a meaning, since we should need to know already the meanings of all other words in order to state all the properties of what the word designates, which, according to the theory, are what the word means.

To put the matter abstractly: We must distinguish properties of different kinds. A thing may have a property not involving any other thing; this sort is called a *quality*. Or it may have a property involving one other thing; such a property is being married. Or it may have one involving two other things, such as being a brother-in-law. If a certain thing has a certain collection of Dualities, and no other thing has just this collection of qualities, then it can be defined as “the thing having such-and-such qualities.” From its having these qualities, nothing can be deduced by pure logic as to its relational properties. Hegel thought that, **[773]** if enough was known about a thing to distinguish it from all other things, then all its properties could be inferred by logic. This was a mistake, and from this mistake arose the whole imposing edifice of his system. This illustrates an important truth, namely, that the worse your logic, the more interesting the consequences to which it gives rise.

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